Thursday Memo – June 22, 2017

23yo F, GSW to the Leg, Day 13

At first, the term 'gunshot wound' was exciting… this was the first time I’ve seen anything like this. When I entered the room, I was caught off guard by how young the patient looked. She was 3 years younger than me. She had a large bandage on her leg and was wearing a short dress to prevent any pain that pants or shorts might cause. She and her mom were visibly hesitant to talk to me, but I persisted and began asking questions as usual. She began to tell me a little bit of her story. She was living at a shelter with her 6-month-old son. Her room is on the second floor, but now she can barely get onto the exam table without the help of two people. She told me how she spent two days in the ER and was sent home with a prescription for Motrin 800mg TID. I couldn’t help but wonder why I received 60 Vicodin after a simple shoulder procedure, but she received Motrin. The medication was clearly not managing her pain — she was miserable and immobile.

It has been a week and a half since the shooting and she has struggled to take care of herself and her son. She told me how on several occasions she could not even make it to the bathroom on time. She relies on her mother for bathing and struggles to dress herself. Through all this, she didn’t want to ask for help. She pushed through, trying to maintain her independence and to not be a burden on others. Her strength and determination was obvious. She explained that if she left the shelter, she wouldn’t be able to get her own apartment in the future. I appreciated her drive to remain independent, but couldn’t help but feel that her care and her health were suffering due to her socioeconomic status and the stigma surrounding her injury.

Eventually, Dr. Barnard asked her about how she was dealing with all this and she began to break down crying. It wasn’t just an interesting gunshot wound — it was a traumatic event that will likely have long lasting side effects on her mental health. Today’s visit may not have fixed her medical condition, but it will hopefully give her the ability to continue maintaining her independence and provide for her son. I continue to be amazed by the strength of the patients that I have seen in the past two weeks on my Family Medicine rotation, and this patient was a perfect example of both the strengths and failures of our medical system.